

IN THE CLAIMS:

Claims 1, 4-12 and 15-20 are pending in this application. Please cancel claims 2-3 and 13-14 without prejudice or disclaimer, and amend claims 1 and 4-12, as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A method implemented by a program for a question-answering apparatus having [[a]] communication equipment for receiving an input of a question document, a storage for storing a plurality of reply examples and a CPU for performing a reply composition process of replying to the question document by using a reply example selected from the plurality of reply examples, the program executing method comprising the steps of:

receiving an input of a question document into said communication equipment;

storing in said storage important part keyword frequency information of a keyword of a reply example having an important part, and unimportant part keyword frequency information of a keyword of a reply example having an unimportant part;

dividing said input question document into a plurality of areas;

extracting a plurality of important areas from said input question document;

obtaining a likelihood value of a question content corresponding to each of said plurality of stored reply examples for each of said plurality of areas, by using said reply example keyword frequency information;

combining said plurality of important areas to provide one or a plurality of important parts in accordance with said a reply example candidate likelihood value of said plurality of reply examples obtained for each of said plurality of important areas; and

calculating an importance degree of each of said plurality of areas by using said important part keyword frequency information;

extracting as an important area an area having said calculated importance degree larger than a predetermined threshold value to obtain obtaining a reply example candidate corresponding to said important part by using the plurality of stored reply examples.

- 2-3. (Cancelled).

4. (Currently Amended) The program method according to claim 1 wherein:
 1. said important area extracting step outputs a first extraction result using a first threshold value and a second extraction result using a second threshold value smaller than said first threshold value;
 2. said important part combining step and said reply example candidate obtaining step for said important part are performed for said first and second extraction results;
 3. similarity is judged between a reply example candidate obtained for said first extraction result and a reply example candidate obtained for said second extraction result; and
 4. the program further executes a distribution step of determining, as an output destination of a process result of said reply example candidate obtaining step for said important part, either a first reply composition terminal or a second reply composition terminal respectively combined via a communication line to said question-answering apparatus, in accordance with said similarity.
5. (Currently Amended) The program method according to claim 1, further comprising:
 1. a step of calculating a distribution destination evaluation value of a reply example candidate corresponding to said important part and comparing said distribution destination evaluation value with a predetermined threshold value; and
 2. a distribution step of determining, as an output destination of a process result of said reply example candidate obtaining step for said important part, one of a plurality of reply composition terminals respectively combined via a communication line to said question-answering apparatus, in accordance with a comparison result.
6. (Currently Amended) The program method according to claim 1, further comprising steps of:
 1. transmitting said question document, important part information identifying areas of said combined important parts and reply example candidate information obtained as a process result of said reply example candidate obtaining step for said important part, to a reply composition terminal combined via a communication line to said question-answering apparatus and having a display and an input unit;
 2. displaying, on the display of said reply composition terminal, said question document with the areas of said important parts identified by said important part information in a first emphatic manner and a reply document containing reply

example candidates identified by reply example candidate information; receiving a selection input of one important part in said displayed document by using the input unit; and displaying said one important part selected by said selection input in a second emphatic manner or displaying a reply example candidate corresponding to said one important part in said reply document in a third emphatic manner.

7. (Currently Amended) The program method according to claim 6 wherein:
said transmitting step transmits a plurality of reply example candidates corresponding to said respective important part in a higher order of the reply example candidate likelihood value; and
in response to the selection input of selecting said one important part, the program executes a step of displaying a plurality of reply example candidates corresponding to said one important part in an area different from said reply document.

8. (Currently Amended) The program method according to claim 7 further comprising steps of:
receiving at the input unit said selection input of selecting one of said plurality of reply example candidates; and
in response to said reply example candidate selection input, displaying said selected reply example candidate in said reply document.

9. (Currently Amended) The program method according to claim 6 wherein a predetermined character string in said displayed important parts is emphatically displayed.

10. (Currently Amended) The program method according to claim 6 each of said important parts is emphatically displayed in a different manner.

11. (Currently Amended) The program method according to claim 6 wherein ID information of each of said important parts is displayed together with each of said important parts.

12. (Currently Amended) A question-answering system having a question-answering apparatus and a reply composition terminal combined via a network to said question-answering apparatus, wherein:

 said question-answering apparatus comprises a communication equipment for receiving an input of a question document, a storage for storing a plurality of reply examples and a processor unit for performing a reply composition process of replying to the question document by using a reply example selected from the plurality of reply examples;

 said reply composition terminal comprises a communication apparatus for receiving a result of said reply composition process, a display for displaying information contained in said reply composition process result and an input unit for receiving an input for said display information; [[and]]

said storage stores important part keyword frequency information of a keyword of a reply example having an important part, and unimportant part keyword frequency information of a keyword of a reply example having an unimportant part;

the processor unit divides said input question document into a plurality of areas;

 the processor unit of said question-answering apparatus extracts a plurality of important areas from said input question document, obtains a likelihood value of a question content corresponding to each of said plurality of stored reply examples for each of said plurality of areas, by using said reply example keyword frequency information, combines said plurality of important areas to provide one or a plurality of important parts in accordance with said the reply example candidate likelihood value of said plurality of reply examples obtained for each of said plurality of important areas, calculates an importance degree of each of said plurality of areas by using said important part keyword frequency information or said unimportant part keyword frequency information, extracts as an important area an area having said calculated importance degree larger than a predetermined threshold value to obtain and obtains a reply example candidate corresponding to said important part by using the plurality of stored reply examples to output said reply composition process result.

13-14 (Cancelled).

15. (Original) The question-answering system according to claim 12 wherein:
 1. said important area extraction outputs a first extraction result using a first threshold value and a second extraction result using a second threshold value smaller than said first threshold value;
 2. said important part combining process and said reply example candidate obtaining process for said important part are performed for said first and second extraction results;
 3. similarity is judged between a reply example candidate obtained for said first extraction result and a reply example candidate obtained for said second extraction result; and
 4. a distribution destination of a process result of said reply example candidate obtaining process for said important part is determined either as a first reply composition terminal or as a second reply composition terminal respectively combined via a communication line to said question-answering apparatus, in accordance with said similarity.
16. (Original) The question-answering system according to claim 12, wherein:
 1. a plurality type of reply composition terminals are provided;
 2. the processor unit of said question-answering apparatus calculates a distribution destination evaluation value of a reply example candidate corresponding to said important part and compares said distribution destination evaluation value with a predetermined threshold value; and
 3. an output destination of a process result of said reply example candidate obtaining process for said important part is determined as one of a plurality of reply composition terminals respectively combined via a communication line to said question-answering apparatus, in accordance with a comparison result.
17. (Original) The question-answering system according to claim 12, wherein:
 1. said question-answering apparatus transmits said question document, important part information identifying areas of said combined important parts and reply example candidate information obtained as a result of said reply example candidate obtaining process for said important part, to said reply composition terminal; and

said reply composition terminal displays on the display, said question document with the areas of said important parts identified by said important part information in a first emphatic manner and a reply document containing reply example candidates identified by reply example candidate information.

18. (Original) The question-answering system according to claim 17, wherein:

 said reply composition terminal receives a selection input of one important part in said displayed document by using the input unit; and

 the display displays said one important part selected by said selection input in a second emphatic manner or displays a reply example candidate corresponding to said one important part in said reply document in a third emphatic manner.

19. (Original) The question-answering system according to claim 18 wherein:

 said question-answering apparatus transmits a plurality of reply example candidates corresponding to said respective important part in a higher order of the reply example candidate likelihood value; and

 said display displays a plurality of reply example candidates corresponding to said one important part in an area different from said reply document, in response to the selection input of selecting said one important part, and

 in response to said selection input of selecting one of said plurality of reply example candidates via said input unit, displays said selected reply example candidate in said reply document by replacing said reply example candidate displayed with said reply document with said selected reply example candidate.

20. (Original) The question-answering system according to claim 17 wherein information of each of said important parts is displayed together with each of said important parts.